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# WHY WE NEED THE CIA

A former Director of the agency  
puts television coverage of its  
activities into historical perspective

By John A. McCone

[The Central Intelligence Agency has been much in the news lately, as television news has covered Congressional investigations of the agency's activities. To add to viewers' understanding of that coverage, we present this article by John A. McCone, who was Director of the CIA during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, 1961-65. Before that, he was one of the architects of the Department of Defense, and served as Deputy Secretary of Defense under James Forrestal.]

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Any government, including even those which have the most elementary international association, must collect foreign intelligence. This pursuit of a special kind of information—and its refined product, which is knowledge—is an indispensable function.

Vigorous nations depend on their leaders to devise a strategy that will provide both for their security and for their economic and political well-being. History teaches us that leaders cannot meet this responsibility unless they

learn the political, economic and military capabilities and intentions of other nations.

Today, great nations are armed as never before. And the leaders of great states must take heed of the risk involved. Furthermore, in their economic life, nations both large and small are interdependent, one with the other—more now than ever before in the past.

On the military side, the maneuvering of possible hostile forces, the deployment of mass-destruction weapons and—what could be of greater importance?—the hidden development of even more advanced weaponry, must all be discovered in good time and their possible effects measured. On the economic side, the task of intelligence services that provide information to safeguard the well-being of the state has lately been vastly amplified: a consortium has appeared that seeks to get economic advantage by imposing quotas and exorbitant prices on raw materials that heretofore have been in relatively free international flow.

Walter Lippmann once wrote, "Foreign policy is the shield of the Republic"; and Sherman Kent, the distinguished historian, has said, "Strategic intelligence is the thing that gets the shield to the proper place at the right time. It is also the thing that stands ready to guide the sword."

What these men are saying is merely that sound decisions designed to protect the security interests and the economic and political welfare of our country can only be made against a background of knowledge. Without the knowledge gained from foreign-intelligence gathering methods, and the appraisal of the significance of that knowledge developed through careful and studious analysis of the information, leaders can make no policy decisions with reasonable assurance that the action they plan is a correct one.

All vigorous nations, large and small, support a foreign-intelligence apparatus. Invariably, the organization is clandes-

tine. Even in open societies, practical considerations demand that the organization be kept out of public view and its work made known only to the few who need to know. Usually, the authority granted to this organization and the control over it are both embedded at the topmost echelon of power. When you make public disclosure of the intimate details of a foreign-intelligence service you paralyze an otherwise effective operation.

It is no surprise that the so-called superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—both maintain elaborate intelligence systems; but the intelligence efforts of other countries throughout the world, some 40 in all, are also significant. Among them all, the intelligence service of the United States is the only one (except West Germany's) that was initiated and authorized legislatively—in our case, by Congressional action after long and thoughtful consideration by both houses of the Congress and with its operations and budgets reviewed by Congressional committees.

We got into the foreign intelligence business fairly recently. Between the two World Wars, the United States maintained little in the way of an intelligence community. To be sure, the Army and the Navy maintained separate intelligence units of their own, specifically to meet their needs in times of war. The Department of State kept a watchful eye on world happenings, and ambassadors regularly reported their observations. But, we had no organization in existence to analyze the whole flow of information and to study the dangers to American security inherent in the pattern of action reported from abroad. Thus, an inquiry into our surprise at Pearl Harbor, conducted after World War II, disclosed that our various government agencies had in hand—days prior to the actual attack—all essential information concerning Japan's preparations for war, including the assembly and departure of the Japanese fleet. →

The State, War and Navy Departments had each gathered the information, and each had used it for its own special interests, but—disastrously—no branch of government then had the duty to put the information together and alert the President of impending danger.

It was to correct this gaping deficiency in our government machinery that the Central Intelligence Agency was created under the National Security Act of 1947. To ensure that it would remain apart from partisan attachments and parochial interests, the CIA was developed essentially as a civilian organization.

It was then recognized that many departments of government must, in the interests of their departmental responsibilities and to broaden the base of all intelligence appraisals, continue their own intelligence efforts. I am speaking of the intelligence division of the State Department known as the Bureau of Intelligence and Research—a thoughtful organization that assesses information for the State Department; the Defense Intelligence Agency that supports the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, coordinates the work of the three separate service intelligence units and manages the corps of military attachés; the intelligence units of the Army, Navy and Air Force maintained to serve their Chiefs of Service and to provide current technical intelligence information to field commanders; the intelligence units of the Treasury Department, and the Energy Research and Development Agency (formerly the Atomic Energy Commission), both of which contribute important specialized information on foreign developments; and, finally, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which, in the course of its extensive domestic operations, is constantly unearthing information either originating abroad or having a significant foreign connection.

At the apex of this large, complex community is the Central Intelligence Agency. Its Director, as the President's

principal intelligence officer, is charged by Presidential directive with the responsibility for the general direction of the community as a whole. This function he carries out in his individual role and as chairman of the United States Intelligence Board, which is the senior body of the community, and is composed of the directors of several departmental intelligence organizations.

The Central Intelligence Agency's responsibilities, as established by law, range from the collection of overt and covert intelligence by its own considerable establishment to the correlation and assessment of intelligence findings from all sources. In addition, the CIA is charged with protecting intelligence sources and methods and with executing tasks assigned by the President or the National Security Council. Under this latter mandate fall such essential activities as counterintelligence, which means ferreling out, together with the FBI, the covert activities of others. Also, the mandate covers covert political action and covert paramilitary operations—the supporting or training and equipping of third-country nationals who espouse our principles of freedom and who are under attack by Communist forces directed from the center of Communist power.

Unevaluated intelligence—raw, as it is known in the trade—comes in many ways. Through the long sweep of history, human contact, both open and covert, has been the major source of intelligence. Conversations between heads of state, reports from ambassadors and military attachés, and articles in newspapers and other publications all contribute to the inventory of information. But the richest source is usually the secret agent, a well-trained professional, concealed under disarming cover, who usually moves in the highest and most informed circles.

The ethics of clandestine intelligence operations have long been debated and some would do away with them. The

fact is that no international covenant forbids clandestine operations, and they go on as they have for centuries. At least 40 nations today support clandestine services—no great state can abandon them.

In the recent past, technology has enormously lengthened the reach and sharpened the penetration of intelligence. High-flying aircraft carrying sophisticated cameras, supplemented by orbital satellites equipped with even more advanced cameras, have been able to look down into fortress societies and record in startling detail what is actually developing.

A correspondingly wide range of electronic sensing and tracking devices makes it quite possible to accurately deduce the yield of nuclear devices, exploded either in the atmosphere or underground, at great distances; and to supply information on the characteristics and performance of military equipment that is being developed and tested beyond otherwise impenetrable frontiers. Indeed, in the event of a surprise attack, we would get our first warning of the blow being prepared from these intelligence-gathering systems.

Gathering the information is only the start of the intelligence process. The raw material, once obtained, must be drawn together, analyzed and correlated. And it must be evaluated before it becomes useful knowledge. An estimate of the developing situation emerges, and from this estimate a head of state, consulting with his advisers, can chart a course of action that will best meet the developing situation. Without the intelligence itself and the sophisticated estimate, the head of a government would be groping toward a decision.

All raw intelligence entering the community flows in one form or another to the CIA. From this processing comes a digest of what it all means and an estimate of what its consequences could be. The bits and pieces of informa-

tion from near and far are studied by men and women of the highest capabilities: political scientists, economists, historians, linguists, engineers, physicists and other experts.

Daily intelligence reports are sent to the President and his principal advisers. Finally, there appears a body of papers known as the National Intelligence Estimates, presenting a continuing analysis of military, political and economic situations that bear directly on our national security and well-being. All are the product of the analytical process and are prepared within the halls of the Central Intelligence Agency, with a substantial oversight by the United States Intelligence Board.

Preparing this body of literature in its various forms is, in my opinion, the most important activity of the agency. It is certainly the least publicized.

In the discharge of its duties, the United States Intelligence Board gathers weekly at CIA headquarters—and often more frequently—to review the national estimates prepared by the CIA analysts. This review is made before the estimates are passed to the President and to others by the Director. It is also within the Board's purview to advise the Director on how best to supply the intelligence needs of the Nation's policy-makers, schedule the flights of the reconnaissance satellites and photographic planes, fix the tasks of the National Security Agency, advise the precautions that may be desirable for protecting the Nation's intelligence sources and methods, and maintaining a watch office, to be constantly on the alert for surprise hostile developments.

In the tempest—abundantly reported by television and the press—that has been whirling over the heads of the intelligence community and particularly the CIA in recent months, the accusation is frequently sounded that our intelligence community is an un supervised, free-wheeling body—a law unto itself. This simply is not true. The →

President, himself, exercises control in a number of ways: through personal contact with his Director; through the Office of Budget and Management and a subcommittee of the National Security Council that oversees covert activities; and also through a civilian advisory board that meets frequently, reviews the community's operations and reports to the President. The House of Representatives and the Senate have special committees to oversee the community's activities and to review its budgets.

For all of this extensive oversight, recent accusations of wrongdoing—some imagined, others grossly overstated, but still a few justified—have set up a clamor for closer supervision of the intelligence operations and especially the clandestine activities.

In my opinion, the noise has been so great and the image of CIA has become so tarnished that changes must be made to extinguish, as much as possible, criticism, to restore confidence and to provide an on-going dynamic foreign intelligence service. But no changes will be useful unless the Congress, the press and electronic media, and the public can feel assured that the Nation's entire intelligence service, in playing its part to ensure the well-being of our Nation, will always confine its operations to acceptable moral and legal standards.

The remedies involve both legislative and executive action. As we seek change, we must take great care not to damage the effectiveness of the intelligence organization and we must accept the practical truth that a foreign intelligence operation, to be effective at all, must by its very nature remain "in privacy"—its activities must be cloaked in secrecy. In a free society, we find it difficult to accept this concept, but society must accept the "cloak."

The proximity of the Central Intelligence Agency and its Director to the President and the National Security Council should be made more con-

spicuous. Indeed, it might be advisable to identify the organization as an arm of the National Security Council and identify it that way by name. Its Director would then be the Nation's principal intelligence officer, with statutory authority over all of the activities now conducted by the CIA and with general supervision over the community as a whole. A subcommittee of NSC with high-level representation from State, Defense, Treasury and the White House itself, could provide a watchful eye over all intelligence activities, not merely certain covert operations as now is the case. The President's Civilian Advisory Board should continue to provide him with an informed viewpoint outside of the channels of government.

To strengthen Congressional oversight, I suggest we create a single joint committee on intelligence, with membership drawn from both houses and adequately staffed. Such a committee should function in the same manner as the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy has functioned for almost 30 years. The confidentiality of all that is provided to this committee that I propose must remain within the committee, as has been the case through the years with our nuclear affairs. In particular, oversight by such a joint committee must be accepted as oversight by the Congress as a whole.

In one way or another, risks of leaks and disclosures of sensitive operations must be lessened or eliminated under severe penalties, authorized by law.

Beyond this, anyone who has been seriously connected with the responsibilities of national security will hope that our prolonged and painful review of the roles and missions of the CIA, and the work of the intelligence community as a whole, will end up by preserving an organization that can serve our security needs and yet rest comfortably within American political philosophy. Our Nation would hardly be safe without such an establishment. END

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